

The Synergy of the MCMAP Mindset

James C. Fuller

CG 12

February 20, 2009

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 20 FEB 2009		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2009 to 00-00-2009	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Synergy of the MCMAP Mindset				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) United States Marine Corps,Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University,2076 South Street, Marine Corps Combat Development Command,Quantico,VA,22134-5068				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 11	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

The United States Marine Corps has been a martial culture since its inception. A standard definition of the word "martial" sounds like a Marine Corps recruiting slogan that would attract young Americans seeking to live the life of a true warrior. Simply put, martial is defined as "relating to, or suggestive of war. Relating to or connected with the armed forces or the profession of arms. Characteristic or befitting a warrior."¹ When viewed in this aspect, it is readily apparent that Marines are members of a sub-culture skilled in the application of a "martial" profession. All of the training and preparation is geared toward success on the battlefield. From the moment young recruits arrive on the famed "yellow footprints" until end of active service as Marines, their primary focus is on executing the profession of arms in defense of the Constitution. There is both a science and an art to this chosen profession. It takes years of research and development to procure and field technologically advanced weapons systems that will give us an advantage America's enemies. There are complex mathematical equations that correlate to the trajectories of ordinance and ensure its effective delivery. This is an example of the science portion. The art however, is much less concrete, and it is not easily identified. The human

dimension of leadership, the complexities of interacting with and coordinating human behaviors during times of duress, and how they relate to mission accomplishment are examples of the art. The successful execution of a martial art is dependent on a properly focused mindset and approach to the sub-cultural duties that direct and guide actions. This is the point where the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) comes to the forefront.

Background of MCMAP

In February of 2002, Bravo Company of The Basic School had the privilege of hearing then Commandant, General James L. Jones speak on his reasoning behind the implementation of the Marine Corps martial arts program. General Jones was addressing a class of newly commissioned Second Lieutenants. The classroom was full and he had the students' undivided attention as they were told of his experiences as a Platoon Commander in Vietnam. They were told of the South Korean Marines and their daily practice of Tae Kwon Do. They were also told of the high morale, E'Sprit De Corps, and combat proficiency of the Korean Marines. There was even slight laughter from the students when they were informed that the practice intimidated some of his Marines. The lesson was driven home, and no one

laughed when he elaborated on the extent of the Korean Marine Corps' dedication to the Asian martial art. Their program was more than a physical routine comprised of punches, kicks and throws; it was a mindset and a focus. The martial art was a foundation of their training that permeated their military culture. The end result was a motivated, highly trained, and lethal force that did not encounter the same harassing attacks from the enemy as their American counterparts.

It speaks to the magnitude of that experience when a young Officer carries that with him through the ranks for thirty-four years and ultimately creates a program that represents nothing less than a cultural change in a respected and successful institution.

Argument

The question that arises is whether or not MCMAP is relevant on the modern battlefield where advanced technology reigns supreme. Is there space for the individual beside the precision guided munitions and unmanned aerial vehicles, and does human mindset matter when utilizing these weapons systems? The answer of course is yes, and furthermore a martial mindset has never been more important than it is right now. Younger and less

experienced Marines are being forced, out of necessity, to make decisions that would seem inconceivable to General Jones' Marines in Vietnam. The collapsed spectrum of conflict due to instant access to a global medium will put a young Marine in the international spotlight with the simple mistimed pull of a weapon trigger. Add to that the likelihood of low-intensity belligerents now having access to once state-controlled weapons, and it is easy to see how a single decision or indecision by an individual can have strategic impacts. Never before have we been faced with such possibilities. Now is the time to reinforce the "when and why" to make appropriate decisions rather than just "how". The mental and character training inherent in the Marine Corps martial arts program accomplishes just that.

Properly focused and trained Marines is the desired end result of the program, yet there does not seem to be enough "buy in" at the command level for the advantages of a properly executed, fully integrated martial arts program. In spite of MARADMIN 537.01, ALMAR 042/01, and MCO 1500.54A that establish and define the program, MCMAP is an afterthought for the unit and practiced by a few dedicated individuals. In short, the integration of MCMAP is just not seen as vital to mission accomplishment.

The proposal is that units at the Regiment to Company level receive mandates that require them to incorporate the synergy of MCMAP into their training plans. The latest practice of requiring specific military occupational specialties (MOS) to receive advanced belts has fallen short of its intended mark. The value of the martial arts program is not MOS specific, and any attempt to make it so is contrary to the intent of the program. If this type of action continues, then MCMAP will go the way of "LINE" training from the early and mid 1990's. LINE training was abandoned because Colonel Bristol states that, "it always remained outside the mainstream, practiced with zeal in entry-level training and later by a few stalwarts, but ignored by the Corps as a whole."² The current MCMAP program may not be the answer to every scenario, nor is it intended to be; but if it is ignored in the same manner as LINE then we risk losing it to the same fate.

Progression through the MCMAP belt system should be tied to promotion. All Marines are required to display greater levels of maturity and judgment as they progress in rank. Martial art training is another tool to develop leaders as they move to positions of increased

responsibility. A properly executed program, complete with character tie-ins and mental development through studies goes hand in hand with the intent of the Marine Corps mentoring program. The focus is on taking experience and valuable lessons, and passing those on to those Marines who have yet to benefit from years of uniformed service.

Following is an excerpt from MCO 1500.54A that states "MCMAP is an integrated martial art designed for and executed by all Marines throughout their careers. Through the fusion of mental and character disciplines within intensely physical application, a permanent change occurs in a Marine regardless of rank, billet, or time served."³ As is evident by this statement, MCMAP is designed for all Marines to assist them in leading, following and growth through personal development.

Benefits of future integration

The above mentioned scenario is not advocating, nor is it intended to depict entire Battalions in physical training formations practicing martial arts moves, which has its place, but certainly is not meant to be applied en-masse for all aspects of training. This too would be counter-productive and contrary to the intent of the program. The training should be accomplished by all Marines

and carried throughout their career. The importance of the USMC martial arts program is evident in the mindset of the individual Marine and the perspective that he or she gains in dealing with adverse situations. The program teaches the physical skills seen in the combat conditioning and belt-level appropriate techniques, but that is only a small portion of the program. The remaining two-thirds of the program's synergy are dedicated to mental and character conditionings. The obvious benefits of a fully conditioned Marine are outlined in MARADMIN 042/01, and are as follows:

"This program provides our Marines with additional tools that they can use on the battlefield. It will require a consistent individual investment of time to develop and master the skills. The benefits of improved self-esteem, mental discipline, and personal pride are worthy of the investment and provide substantial returns for our Corps."⁴

In light of current and projected future conflicts, it can be stated that the Marine Corps needs thinking Marines at all levels that can operate under Commander's intent. The Marine Corps is primarily a small wars force and has excelled because it is flexible and capable of defeating a variety of threats. The Marine Corps is mandated to be the most ready when the nation is the least, and that includes

more than just physical conditioning and skill with a weapon. America deserves Marines who can be trusted explicitly to make the correct decision and utilize their weapons when called upon. This is what it means to be the Nation's force-in-readiness. Any Marine executing these duties must be fully trusted to execute mission-type orders that are fully nested with higher headquarters' intent, across the spectrum of conflict, and range of military operations.

Conclusion

The synergy of MCMAP aims to produce a Marine fully trained in the physical skills and armed with a properly focused mindset that guarantees appropriate decisions are made at crucial times. Anything less will be potentially devastating to the individual, the Marine Corps, and the Nation as viewed through the public eye. What the Marine Corps demands, and the American public expects from someone who has earned the title is a physically skilled individual who is trained, respected, trusted, and relied upon during times of duress. The ultimate goal is someone who uses his or her skills to protect those they are sworn to defend, this is what it means to be a warrior, a martial artist, and ultimately a Marine.

Word count 1758

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¹ American Heritage College Dictionary

² George H. Bristol. "Integrated fighting system – the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program." Marine Corps Gazette, No. 7 (2001): 38.

³ Marine Corps Order 1500.54A

⁴ ALMAR 042/01

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